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Conscience and Boundaries of Practical Reason

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**Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM, PhD
Department of Philosophy
St. John Vianney Theological Seminary
1300 S. Steele St.
Denver, Colorado 80210**

“Jesus said to the crowds: The Reign of God is like a buried treasure which a man found in a field. He hid it again, and rejoicing at his find went out and sold all he had and bought that field.” (Matthew 13:44-45)

In this lecture I will address a serious topic that is often neglected by philosophers teaching in Catholic seminaries and universities: namely, how to find the conscience and to demonstrate its proper operation. In contemporary American society we learn of people who seem to have a disengaged conscience or logic-tight compartmentalized conscience in one or another area of their activities. While in most areas of their life these same people may be very generous hearted and morally upright, ^{another} in one area their actions give evidence of something different in that they choose to harm an innocent person. This phenomenon leads mothers to claim that their conscience allows them to kill their unborn child, trusted adults to claim that their conscience allows them to sexually abuse children or youth, ^{business executives} or others to claim that their conscience allows them to take money for themselves from people who have entrusted it to them for a broader common good. ~~How is it that~~ these people seem to reveal a lack of unity of life? I will try to show that part of the reason why unity of life is sometimes absent is that we philosophers are not properly teaching about conscience today.

Even ~~in~~ ^{the} 19th century moral theologian Antonio Rosmini noted the absence of philosophers' attention to this topic in his extensive work entitled *Conscience*:

The study of conscience is of its nature philosophical. It is in fact a part of the special logic of ethics. Nevertheless it has been carried out entirely by Christian theologians without much assistance from philosophers.

It may seem strange that philosophers have consistently neglected the study of the rules directing human moral conscience. But because abstractions and generalities are their preoccupation, it is not easy to bring philosophers

down to earth.¹

This rather serious criticism of philosophers' neglect of conscience has been met recently by several new works. Notable among these are: *Crisis of Conscience* which includes articles by Carlo Caffarra, Ignacio Carrasco de Paula, Wojciech Giertych, O.P, John Haas, Ralph McInerny, Servais Pinchaers, O.P., Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, and Robert Spaemaan; J. Budziszewski, 's *The Revenge of Conscience: Politics and the Fall of Man*; Pauline Westerman's study of *The Disintegration of Natural Law Theory: Aquinas to Finnis*; and works by philosophers in the Lublin School of Thomistic Personalism including especially M.A. Krapiec, Karol Wojtyla, and Tadeusz Styczen.

A philosophical approach to the study of conscience must be distinguished from both a theological approach which focuses on how conscience connects a person to God or separates a person from God and a psychological approach which focuses on identifying wounds to an individual person which interfere with the proper operation of conscience and on therapeutic methods where it is possible to heal these wounds. Furthermore, within a philosophical approach to conscience it is possible to differentiate the perspectives of ethics and social political philosophy from philosophical anthropology.

While most contemporary philosophical approaches fall into the first two ^{philosophical} approaches and focus on how to derive particular ethical judgments from principles of natural law, my approach will be preliminary to ethical judgments; it will consider the perspective of the human person and how he or she uses faculties and powers in exercising conscience. In particular, I will discuss how conscience is properly understood as the act of a person

exercising the practical intellect in evaluating the moral quality of something he or she has done in the past, is doing in the present, or is consider to do in the future. Then I will critique erroneous views which remove the boundary of the practical intellect from the conscience and place it instead in the six fallacious categories of the imagination, emotions, memory, distorted hearing of an inner voice, theoretical intellect, or will.

In my view, a proper understanding of conscience must be based upon the teaching of Thomas Aquinas and draw upon its developments in Thomistic personalism. Furthermore, it must actively engage with serious distortions about conscience as taught in most secular philosophy. We do no service to our students in seminaries or Catholic universities if we ignore Catholic teaching about conscience at the same time as we fill their minds with erroneous secular thought about conscience. Instead we need to teach them how to find the treasure of conscience in such a way that they can lead others to sell all to buy the field in which conscience is buried. With these introductory reflections I will now turn to illustrate the claims I have just made.

I

The Proper Boundary of Conscience: The Practical Intellect

Thomas Aquinas discussed conscience from the perspective of the philosophical anthropology in his Treatise on Man in the *Summa Theologica* Pt. 1, Q. 79, art. 13: ^{conscience} 'Whether Conscience Be A Power?' and in his disputed questions *On Truth*, Question 17, arts. 1-5 'On Conscience' which consider whether conscience is a power, a habit, or an act and under which conditions conscience is truthful or binds.² The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* follows

Thomas in stating that conscience is an act of the practical judgment concerning an act we are doing now, we have done, or are considering to do in the future.³

M. A. Krapiec, O.P. clarifies in *I-Man: An Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology* that “This act of knowledge, which continually suggests to the person: ‘Do this,’ ‘Don’t do that,’ ‘Do it this way or that way,’ is an act of the intellect in the practical sphere, analogous to an act of the intellect in the theoretical order when it brings forth ‘existential judgments.’”⁴ According to Thomas the theoretical intellect is not a separate faculty from the practical intellect. There is one intellectual power which sometimes is directed towards the apprehension of truth (as speculative) and at other times is directed towards the operation of a good act (as practical).⁵ When we say that the conscience is found in an act of the practical intellect we mean that after the speculative intellect determines a true principle, the practical intellect applies it in a judgment about the good that was done, is being done, or will be done.

In a careful study on *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* Timothy Potts has traced the very complex relation between conscience and synderesis in several different formulations by medieval philosophers and theologians.⁶ Synderesis, according to Thomas, is the habit of grasping first principles of natural law derived from the fundamental principle ‘do good and avoid evil.’ In *Summa Theologica* Pt. 1, Q. 79, art 12 he states: “Wherefore the first practical principles, bestowed on us by nature, do not belong to a special power, but to a special natural habit, which we call synderesis.” Ralph McInerny in a recent consideration of ‘Conscience and the Moral Act’ summarizes the relation as follows:

Synderesis is said to urge us to the good and to warn us against evil... It does this by making judgments as to what is good and what is bad. Its judgments, those of *synderesis*, natural law, are universal, general, and are contrasted with the judgment of

choice, which is particular. This is how conscience is distinguished from synderesis: it [that is, conscience] applies the common principles to particular deeds.⁷

It is well noted by McInerney and others that in contemporary discussions synderesis and conscience merge together into a dual operation of conscience.⁸

The treasure of conscience works as an act of the practical intellect analogous to the way in which a motion sensor light turns on in the presence of a particular motion. When a person consults conscience about a particular act he or she has done, is doing, or is thinking about doing, the conscience offers an inner light to evaluate how this act approximates the fundamental natural law, do good and avoid evil. In Thomas' words: "For conscience ... implies the relation of knowledge to something..., i.e. knowledge applied to an individual case. But the application of knowledge to something is done by some act."⁹

Conscience as the act of applying knowledge witnesses the past when we recognize that we have done something good or done something bad by commission or omission; conscience incites or binds us in relation to the future when we judge that something should be done or not done; and conscience excuses, accuses, or torments us in the present or in relation to the past when we discover something is being or has been well done or poorly done.¹⁰

If a person thinks only in general about kinds of acts without a particular act in mind, then the inner light of conscience does not turn on. This is why when people think simply about universal positive laws, they often can not find their conscience, and they erroneously believe that certain kinds of acts are not against their conscience. Sometimes people surrender their individual conscience to external univocal civil laws believing that something which previously seemed to be against their moral conscience, but which now has become legal, is no

longer against their conscience. However, conscience operates always internally within a person regardless of external positive laws.

Writing in the context of communist occupied Poland, in which many civil laws were thought to be immoral and therefore contrary to an individual person's conscience, M. A.

Krapiec articulated well in *Person and Natural Law* how conscience always binds analogically in its application by a particular person to a civil law:

Thus, every legal positive command cannot but pass through the 'filter' of the human conscience, which always personally relates the person to the legal command. Otherwise, a person would not act as a person who is free and responsible for actions which he or she undertakes in the face of the law, but would act like a machine which is univocally directed 'from the outside'.¹¹

Krapiec bases his understanding of the analogical application of natural law on a metaphysics of analogy of being and cognition.¹²

Evaluating a particular act we have done, are doing, or are thinking of doing by the precept of 'Do good and avoid evil' occurs by an analogical particular judgment in the person consulting his or her conscience. In discussion of 'the first analogical realizations of natural law' Fr. Krapiec follows Thomas Aquinas and Ulpian in considering the analogical development of the three natural inclinations to conserve one's life, to generate life, and to develop one's personality fully in society.¹³ Since the fuller articulation of these principles falls under the broader study of ethics and social and political philosophy we will not consider them here.

The theoretical reason is essential to the operation of conscience because it is based on the cognition of particular truth. That the practical judgment of conscience must be based on the apprehension of truth has been frequently emphasized in recent texts. John Paul II, *On the*

Splendour of Truth dedicates Part II of chapter II to the topic 'Conscience and Truth:'

Consequently, in the practical judgment of conscience, which imposes on the person the obligation to perform a given act, the link between freedom and truth is made manifest. Precisely for this reason conscience expresses itself in acts of 'judgment' which reflect the truth about the good, and not in arbitrary 'decisions'. The maturity and responsibility of these judgments — and, when all is said and done, of the individual who is their subject — are not measured by the liberation of the conscience from objective truth, in favour of an alleged autonomy in personal decisions, but, on the contrary, by an insistent search for truth and by allowing oneself to be guided by that truth in one's actions.¹⁴

In his address to the American Bishops in 1991 on 'Conscience and Truth,' Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger appraised the life of Socrates and Cardinal Newman observing that "A man of conscience, is one who never acquires tolerance, well-being, success, public standing, and approval on the part of prevailing opinion, at the expense of truth."¹⁵

Personalist philosophy adds to Thomas Aquinas by arguing that conscience should be better considered as an act of a person, rather than simply as an act of a practical intellect abstracted from a person. The tendency to describe conscience simply as the act of judgment of a practical intellect today seems to support a Cartesian mentality of isolating the mind and a Lockean mentality of a disengaged consciousness from the unified person in whom it operates.¹⁶ Karol Wojtyla states that conscience is the act of a person who exercises the practical reason:

[Action] has a fundamental significance for the interpretation of the person. It also simultaneously opens an approach to an interpretation of the conscience, which again only seems possible on the assumption that to act stays in a necessary dynamic relation to the fulfillment of the person in the action. There seems to be no other possible road to an understanding of that specific progress expressing the vitality of the conscience, of its purely personalistic sense.¹⁷

This personalistic approach to conscience necessitates the integration of the will, memory,

emotions, imagination, senses, and theoretical intellect into unified acts of a person seeking fulfillment.

The approach of Thomistic personalism also insists that conscience has a positive function as well as a negative critical function in judging past acts through guilt and a bad conscience. Conscience is understood in both Thomism and personalism as having the power to guide a person to the treasure of the true good in particular acts. Conscience is the treasure that is buried in the field of one's self. Again Wojtyla states the personalistic principles:

[The vitality of conscience] reaches with its roots to the ontological status of the personal fulfilment of the ego in the action...

Axiologically, however, this fulfillment is reached only through the good, while moral evil leads or amounts to, so to speak, nonfulfillment.¹⁸

Since a person can only be fulfilled through a constant consulting and acting in accordance with the treasure of his or her conscience, it follows that it is worth 'selling everything' by getting rid of all false pathways leading one away from conscience in order to buy the field in which this treasure resides. The next part of this lecture will turn to these false pathways as delineated by philosophers. Persons often look for their conscience in the wrong place by crossing a boundary of their practical intellect and trying to find their conscience in imagination, emotions, memory, senses, theoretical reason or will. Many philosophers have misled people genuinely looking for the path of their conscience. Let us look at six ways the path to conscience can be lost. How do we lose the path to our buried treasure? Like the effect of mineral deposits inside a mountain draw a compass needle away from true north, 'partial truths and errors' can mislead us rendering us less able to mine the treasure within. ✕

Wrong Places to Look for Conscience

Conscience and the Imagination

In a series of lectures given at Yale University in the late 1800's and early 1900's William James carefully developed a new philosophy of pragmatism built on the triple foundations of the English secular humanist Schiller,¹⁹ the American educator John Dewey, and the American philosopher Charles Pierce.²⁰ When we consider James from the perspective of our search for the treasure of conscience it is hard to overestimate his far reaching effect on the American mind by his direct attacks on religion, conscience, and objective truth and goodness.

In a lecture on human energy William James stated, referring to himself and others, that medical and scientifically oriented men rarely pray:

Few can carry on any living commerce with 'God'... One part of our mind dams up ---the other parts.

Conscience makes cowards of us all. Social conventions prevent us from telling the truth...²¹

The chilling claim that conscience makes all persons cowardly rather than good is supplemented with relentless observations on how conscience hinders, rather than helps, people. First, James argues that conscience makes people scrupulously rigid. Using such negative phrases as a "philistine type of mind" and being "inhibited intellectually" James perceives himself as a liberator to find "the different ways in which their energy-reserves may be appealed to and set loose."²² While it is certainly commendable to reflect on what inhibits someone from prayerful dialogue with God, the equation of conscience with social conventions and a negative force in the human personality is most regrettable.

Further, James argues that conscience can make people hopelessly optimistic. In his *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* James associates people who participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation with a “healthy-minded temperament...which has a constitutional incapacity for prolonged suffering” and desires always an optimistic point of view.²³ Healthy-minded persons, who optimistically minimize evil, are contrasted with sick-minded persons, who pessimistically maximize evil. Neither kind of person, for James, is to be admired.

Third, James states that: “We turn from [“noble, clean-cut fixed, eternal rational, temple-like systems of philosophy”]... to the great unpeint and unstayed wilderness of truth as we feel it to be constituted, with as good a conscience as rationalists are moved by when they turn from our wilderness into their neater and cleaner intellectual abodes.”²⁴ James includes both Protestant rationalist theories and Catholic Scholastic theories in his categories of rationalism:

✓ Scholasticism still opposes to such changes the method of confutation by single decisive reasons, showing that the new view involves self-contradiction, or traverses some fundamental principle. This is like stopping a river by planting a stick in the middle of its bed. Round your obstacle flows the water and ‘gets there all the same.’ In reading some of our opponents, I am not a little reminded of those catholic writers who refute Darwinism by telling us that higher species cannot come from lower because *minus nequit gignere plus*, ... The point of view is too myopic, too tight and close to take in the inductive argument.²⁵ *del.*

James also rejects the very ontological foundation of Catholic philosophy . Anticipating a consequence of his pragmatic theory of truth we will note here a conclusion of his argument:

It would be unfair to philosophy, however, to leave her under this negative sentence. Let me close, then, by briefly enumerating what she can do for religion. If she will abandon metaphysics and deduction for criticism and induction, and frankly

transform herself from theology into science of religions, she can make herself enormously useful."²⁶

James's appeal to a method of criticism and induction is central to his philosophy of pragmatism. Since conscience seeks the particular good to be done in a concrete situation, and since James's understanding of the good depends upon his understanding of truth, our analysis will consider how he redefines both in such a way as to render conscience useless.

In his critical method, James focuses on what he considers to be illusory attitudes towards truth: "Our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth, and that our minds and it are made for each other — what is it but a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs us up?"²⁷ This expression 'what is it but' captures his critical evaluation about the way persons seek to have their desire fulfilled. In contrast, in *Fides et ratio* we read that man may be defined as the one who seeks the truth and further that this search is unstoppable until he encounters the one who is the truth.²⁸

James more explicitly argues against objective certainty and offers a pragmatic method based on a model of empirical investigation in science:

...if you follow the pragmatic method...you must bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of your experience. It appears less as a solution, then, than as a programme for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be changed.

Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest. We don't look back upon them, we move forward, and, on occasion, make nature over again by their aid.²⁹

James argues that pragmatism is also a theory of truth. In his descriptions of how pragmatism works, we discover the furtive role of the imagination:

A new opinion counts as 'true' just in proportion as it gratifies the individual's desire

to assimilate the novel in his experience to his beliefs in stock. It must both lean on old truth and grasp new fact... That new idea is truest which performs most felicitously its function of satisfying our double urgency. It makes itself true, gets classified as true, by the way it works; grafting itself then upon the ancient body of truth, which thus grows much as a tree grows by the activity of a new layer of cambium.³⁰

A not uncommon experience in these days is to have a lobbying group, political party, or news journalist state an opinion so frequently, that it becomes popularly accepted as true. In the pragmatic sense, it works, even if there is no basis in objective reality for its truth or validity. The opinion was made up by imagination, often based on desire for some particular result. Yet, it works because people can easily assimilate it into their previous set of opinions. One can see the problem for conscience in this pragmatic theory of truth. If someone says repeatedly that abortion is a right as, for example, in the following statement by the National Organization of Women on its web page: "An estimated one in two adult women in the U.S. will have an abortion, thereby exercising a basic human right to control their bodies," then a person may assimilate this imaginary claim about a pseudo-right and 'make itself true' in the pragmatic sense.³¹

The pragmatic theory of truth also becomes a pragmatic theory of the good, and the instrumentalism of the epistemological theory shifts into a relativism of the ethical theory. Once again, James clearly states his views: "the only real guarantee we have against licentious thinking is the circumpressure of experience itself, which gets us sick of concrete errors, whether there be a trans-empirical reality or not."³² Conscience seems buried here in trial and error, with an emphasis on error.

William James argues that the passions in the heart propose hypotheses to the mind for

judgment, and the person acts like an umpire, who judges the relative worth of the live hypotheses, and then acts on one of these live hypotheses.³³ Hypotheses propose something not yet the case; they engage the imagination to consider a possible course of action. Then they are tested out for the pragmatist in future experience. James realizes that his audience may not accept this theory when he states: "But sad experience makes me fear that some of you may still shrink from radically saying with me, in abstracto, that we have the right to believe at our own risk any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt our will."³⁴

The secular humanists who followed some of James' central arguments focused their attention on putting the theses into practice in American education and politics. Corliss Lamont in his classic text, *The Philosophy of Humanism* notes John Dewey's work on education and includes as appendices the *Humanist Manifesto of 1933*. When the particular method is applied to ethics we find Lamont echoing James' focus on projecting consequences into the future first by ^{imagining} ~~imagination to develop~~ a hypothesis and second ^{by testing} ~~by experience to test~~ the hypothesis: ^{through experience!}

For Humanism no human acts are good or bad in or of themselves. Whether an act is good or bad is to be judged by its consequences for the individual and society. Knowledge of the good, then, must be worked out, like knowledge of anything else, through the examination and evaluation of the concrete consequences of an idea or hypothesis.³⁵

This secular humanist attitude towards the good hides the treasure of the conscience whose very location is obscured by pleasurable and imagined ideals rather than objective truth.

In *The Acting Person*, Karol Wojtyla criticizes the view that the moral goodness of an act can be determined solely on the basis of its external effects:

We may see at present how action – as well as the fulfilment it brings about--- is connected not only with the outer and transitive effect of acting but also with its inner intransitive effect. and has a fundamental significance for the interpretation of the person. It also simultaneously opens an approach to the interpretation of the conscience, which again only seems possible on the assumption that to act stays in a necessary dynamic relation to the fulfilment of the person in the action. There seems to be no other possible road to an understanding of that specific progress expressing the vitality of the conscience, of its purely personalistic sense.³⁶

The rejection of all universal laws through an erroneous association of the conscience with the imagination leads to a total relativism in ethics. } del

It is important to note that the imagination is very useful when the conscience engages with it concerning possible future actions. Thomas Aquinas states succinctly: “In another way, so far as through the conscience we judge that something should be done or not done; and in this sense, conscience is said to incite or to bind.”³⁷ Thus, when the imagination poses to us a possible act, the conscience judges its moral value and incites us to either do or not do it, and binds us to the moral law within by this act of judgment. } del In this case, as with the memory, the imagination provides the data for the conscience to consider in its practical judgment. The conscience is in touch, however, with a natural law within that incites or prompts a person to do good and avoid evil in a particular way.

Conscience and Emotions

Three different philosophical paths which tend to locate conscience in the emotions are developed by David Hume, recent feminist arguments based on women’s experience, and in Max Scheler’s phenomenological use of the emotions as the source of values.

Providing the second erroneous path to the conscience, Hume’s empirical approach to

ethics eliminated an objective foundation for conscience. In Book III of *Treatise on Human Nature*, Hume concludes that: "Moral distinctions, therefore, are not the offspring of reason. Reason is wholly inactive, and can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals." ³⁸ This erroneous conclusion in Hume's argument flow from his strict limitations of truth to relations of ideas and matters of fact. More important to our discussion, however, are the consequences of his argument and their effect on persons influenced by his philosophy. Hume concludes that conscience is more properly identified with moral sentiment or moral sense and "Morality, therefore, is more properly felt than judg'd of..." ³⁹

When particular feelings are identified as pleasure and pain, the stage is set for the hedonistic and utilitarian approach to conscience so common to contemporary culture:

* *Again Hume says:* Now since the distinguishing impressions, but which moral good or evil is known, are nothing but particular pains or pleasure; it follows, that in all enquiries concerning these moral distinctions, it will be sufficient to show the principles, which make us feel a satisfaction or uneasiness from the survey of any character, in order to satisfy us why the character is laudable or blameable. An action, or sentiment, or character is virtuous or vicious, why? Because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind. ⁴⁰

Karol Wojtyla critiques Hume's reduction of conscience to moral feelings of pain and pleasure in his essay 'The Role of Reason in Ethics.' Comparing Hume with Thomas Aquinas, Wojtyla notes that Hume reduces reason to an instrumental function of finding for the passions how best to satisfy the longing for pleasure and to avoid pain:

We see that Hume emphasized decisively even as a principle what from Thomas' point of view appeared merely as a perversion of the role of reason — one we must guard against if we are to remain true to our nature. Thomas realized, of course, that such a perversion can easily occur, considering the great force and intensity of sensory feelings and the pleasure connected with them. He

saw this, however, as a debasement of human dignity, as activity beneath the level of our rational nature and its abilities. For Thomas, reason is a power — an energy — of human nature that stands close to action because it unites with the will; the will is, after all a rational appetite..."⁴¹

Wojtyla's personalist approach indicates just how far Hume's philosophy leads away from the proper location conscience in the human person. Indeed, once Hume identifies conscience with moral sense, and moral sense with distinct experiences of pleasure and pain, the word 'conscience' hardly appears again in his texts. When conscience is placed primarily in the feelings, it begins a slide into oblivion.

Much contemporary feminism continues this second erroneous path derived from an overemphasis on the emotions; it continues Hume's emphasis on the feelings as a core moral component in women's experience. An anthology published in 1985 and entitled *Women's Consciousness: Women's Conscience: A Reader in Feminist Ethics* is very illuminating in this respect. The title of the book, containing the phrase 'Women's Conscience,' and the divisions within the book entitled: Exploring New Territory: Bringing Women's Experience into Ethics, Mapping Paths and Dreaming Dreams: Retrieving Norms from Experience, and "Staking Our Claims: Situating Feminist Ethical Claims in the Ethics Enterprise seemed to promise much material for reflection on how these feminists viewed conscience."⁴²

The first sentence of the introduction opened directly the issue of conscience as follows: "The last fifteen years have witnessed enormous changes in women's consciousness, but the accompanying changes in our ethical styles -- changes in our consciences -- have received little sustained attention."⁴³ Surprisingly, this opening sentence turned out to be the

only one in the entire book which contained the word 'conscience!' This certainly is an odd phenomenon in which a significant word in the title of the book is used only once in a 300 page text written by several different authors. Conscience seems to slide into the same oblivion here as it did in Hume's writings.

The first sentence to the introduction noted above which contains the phrase "changing of our ethical styles ---changes in our consciences --" may hold the key to the disappearance of the word 'conscience.' It seems to views ethics as a style of concentration on women's experience from within which ethics retrieves norms. If the conscience is not operating in experience, then it will not be retrieved from experience. If women's ethical experience focuses primarily on feelings of connectedness, caring, anger, empowerment, sensuality, and sorrow, then the conscience will remain silent.

This silence of conscience in traditional feminist texts seems to be born out by Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* in which conscience is only noted in passing by one of Gilligan's subjects who says: "My main principle is not hurting people as long as you aren't going against your own conscience and as long as you remain true to yourself...There are no moral absolutes. Laws are pragmatic instruments."⁴⁴ Lorraine Code observes with approval in *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*, that Gilligan's [f]emale subjects' tendencies to contextualize their responses by drawing on a cluster of experiential factors can plausibly be read as evidence of moral strength and sophistication.⁴⁵ However, as those familiar with Gilligan's work know well, the decision for abortion is at times interpreted as evidence of moral strength in a woman who learns to care for herself in spite of the fact that it demonstrates a decision to hurt the developing unborn human being:

In 6.11/12/13/14/15/16/17/18/19/20/21/22/23/24/25/26/27/28/29/30/31/32/33/34/35/36/37/38/39/40/41/42/43/44/45/46/47/48/49/50/51/52/53/54/55/56/57/58/59/60/61/62/63/64/65/66/67/68/69/70/71/72/73/74/75/76/77/78/79/80/81/82/83/84/85/86/87/88/89/90/91/92/93/94/95/96/97/98/99/100

The abortion study demonstrates the centrality of the concepts of responsibility and care in women's constructions of the moral domain, the close tie in women's thinking between conceptions of the self and of morality, and ultimately the need for an expanded developmental theory that includes, rather than rules out from consideration, the differences in the feminine voice.⁴⁶

When we turn to a phenomenological approach, we discover that in contrast to the disappearance of conscience in previous theories focusing on the emotions, Max Scheler directly discusses the conscience in his text *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt towards the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*.⁴⁷ Scheler argues both against the Kantian theory that universalizes a maxim as binding on conscience and against a subjectivism that makes a freedom of conscience totally individual. Instead, he tries to establish conscience as "the individual form of the economization of the moral insight, and representing...this insight only insofar as it is directed to the good as such `for me`."⁴⁸

Furthermore, Scheler following Nietzsche and Freud, identifies conscience as essentially negative in its operation:

In addition it must be realized that conscience functions essentially in a negative fashion, according to the meaning of the term. Conscience represents something as bad or as something that ought not to be: It 'enters a protest.' When we say, "Conscience is aroused," we understand immediately that it is set against a certain action. This never means that conscience tells us that something is good. For this reason a "guilty conscience" is a decisively more positive phenomenon than a "good conscience," which is, strictly speaking, only an experienced lack or absence of a "guilty conscience" vis-à-vis a certain action that is morally in question...The function of conscience is therefore only critical--- in part one of warning and in part one of directing; it has no function of giving original, positive insight.⁴⁹

Wojtyla is highly critical of the claim that conscience gives us only negative insight. Instead, he argues that conscience, even when operating with respect to the lived experience of guilt, is none the less oriented equally to good and to evil. "Conscience is simply the lived experience

of the principles of moral good and evil.⁵⁰

Scheler attempted to derive ethical values from the foundation of the emotions. When he states "Conscience is a *bearer* of moral values, but it is not their ultimate source," Scheler is indicating that the emotions serve as the source of values. In an essay entitled 'The Separation of Experience from the Act in Ethics,' Karol Wojtyla criticizes Scheler's use of the emotions as a source of value:

We are standing here in the presence of the phenomenologist's fatal mistake. Scheler fails to perceive a most elementary and basic truth, namely that the only value that can be called ethical value is a value that has the acting person as its efficient cause. The kind of emotional atmosphere in which such a value arises and in which it becomes a property or real quality of a given person is already something secondary.⁵¹

Wojtyla development of this line of argument against Scheler would hold against Hume and the above mentioned feminist theorists as well:

What is primary is the fact that this value comes from the person as its efficient cause. And this is also where the very core of ethical experience lies. Because Scheler did not manage to objectify this basic fact in his phenomenological interpretation of ethical experience, his whole interpretation deals only with secondary elements, which he tries — at times artificially — to elevate to the primary level. This is the error of Schelerian emotionalism, and both the will and reason, along with its theoretical and practical cognitive powers fell victim to it.⁵²

Certainly the emotions can play an important role in acts of conscience. They can awaken us to an evil to be avoided by their spontaneous uprising by fear, pain, aversion, or anger; they can also awaken us to a good to be done by desire, love, attraction, daring, and hope. They can reveal to us the evil or good of a past action through sorrow or joy; and they can open to us even in the present the moral value of acts we are doing through anxiety or

love. Wojciech Giertych, notes the important place of the emotions in ongoing development of conscience for building virtue:

Sensitive cognition and the consequent movement of the feelings may seem to be entitled to be the directing force in action. But these feelings do not belong to the essence of conscience. Emotions are a psychic and carnal reaction to sensitive cognition. At the same time, they have an innate capacity to follow the judgment of reason. The distinction made between the sensitive utility judgment that motivates the emotions and the judgment of reason in conscience that focuses the movement of the emotions toward rationally perceived objectives is necessary for a clear apprehension of the nature of conscience. The repeated direction of the emotions by reason, which presents values, habituates the emotions to virtuous activity. Growth in virtue is a sign of interior liberation, in which the dynamism of emotions is harnessed in the service of the perceived good.⁵³

We will now turn to consider a third erroneous theory about the location of conscience, its reduction to a function of memory.

Conscience and Memory

It is clear even from the first two examples of erroneous philosophical theories that located the conscience in the imagination or emotions that people mean different things by the same word. While imagination links conscience to the hypothetical future, and emotions to the present, a theory of memory leads us to the past. Sigmund Freud, who is often included in the study of philosophical anthropology because of his proposed model of the human being,⁵⁴ considered the conscience as a function of the superego which was formed in relation to an individual and a collective past.

In *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* Freud offers a description of the particular function of conscience within the superego. After describing how the ego mediates between the external

world and the id (as source of instincts in a child up to the age of five), he argues that a part of the external world, such as parental demands, gets taken into the ego of the child and is internalized:

This new psychical agency continues to carry on the functions which have hitherto been performed by people in the external world: it observes the ego, gives it orders, judges it and threatens it with punishments, exactly like the parents whose place it has been taken. We call this agency the *super-ego* and are aware of it in its juridical functions as our *conscience*.⁵⁵

Freud states in his *New Introductory Lectures* that the conscience is only one of three basic functions of the superego: "Let us return to the super-ego. We have allotted it the functions of self-observation, of conscience, and of (maintaining) the ideal."⁵⁶ Even though here Freud appears to separate out the juridical function or judging function of conscience from the function of self-observation, in other places like *Civilization and its Discontents* he suggests an amalgamation:

The super-ego is an agency which has been inferred by us, and conscience is a function which we ascribe, among other functions, to that agency. This function consists in keeping a watch over the actions and intentions of the ego and judging them, in exercising censorship. The sense of guilt, the harshness of the super-ego, is thus the same thing as the severity of conscience.⁵⁷

Freud often uses the words 'conscience' and 'super-ego' interchangeably. In speaking of melancholia he states: "The most striking feature of this illness... is the way in which the super-ego --- 'conscience', you may call it, quietly ----treats the ego."⁵⁸ Or, "...I inform you that we have found out all kinds of things about the formation of the super-ego ---that is to say, about the origin of conscience."⁵⁹


The link between the superego and memory of the past is made explicitly by Freud in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*:

Thus the super-ego takes up a kind of intermediate position between the id and the external world; it unites in itself the influences of the present and the past. In the establishment of the super-ego we have before us, as it were, an example of the way in which the present is changed into the past.⁶⁰

Freud broadens his initial description of the origin of the conscience function of the superego from simply internalization of parental authority to include other authorities in society. In the following passage from a lecture on narcissism, Freud describes it this way: "The institution of conscience was at bottom an embodiment, first of parental criticism, and subsequently of that of society— a process which is repeated in what takes place when a tendency towards repressions develops out of a prohibition or obstacle that came in the first instance from without."⁶¹ He also broadens the effects of this origin of conscience in a discussion of paranoia a few lines further in the same essay : "Thus the activity of the mind which has taken over the function of conscience has also placed itself at the service of internal research, which furnishes philosophy with the material for its intellectual operations."⁶²

The person, according to Freud, internalizes the parental or cultural commands because he identifies with the parent figure:

The basis of the process is what is called an 'identification' — that is to say, the assimilation of one ego to another one, as a result of which the first ego behaves like the second in certain respects, imitates it and in a sense takes it up into itself.... the installation of the super-ego can be described as a successful instance of identification with the parental agency⁶³

A handwritten red bracket is positioned to the right of the paragraph, spanning from the line 'The basis of the process...' down to 'with the parental agency'. To the right of the bracket, the word 'del' is written in red ink.

In *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud summarizes the effects of this identification when the parent figure has been harsh: "We have also learned how the severity of the super-ego — the demands of conscience — is to be understood. It is simply a continuation of the severity of the external authority, to which it has succeeded and which it has in part replaced."⁶⁴ In this

particular case, Freud relativizes the conscience by equating it with the demands of the superego. Drawing upon this aspect of Freud's theory, J. F. Donceel, S.J. suggests in his classic work on *Philosophical Psychology*: "Freud's Super-ego does not coincide with what we call 'conscience'.... The Super-ego is received passively from without whereas conscience develops actively within." ⁶⁵

It should be noted in passing that Freud thought that a mature adult who no longer has the above type of harsh conscience is more properly characterized as having a mature ego which is able to mediate between the superego's demands and the needs of the id and the world. However, Freud did relegate the conscience to a function of the superego. He realized that a description of the conscience as simply incorporating passively the memory as described above was not adequate to explain all its dynamis. Therefore, he developed a further theory to explain the origin of conscience relating to the way a child attempts to control instincts towards pleasure and towards aggression in Totem and Taboo: "Conscience is the internal perception of the rejection of a particular wish operating with us." ⁶⁶

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud traces the chronological steps in this process of relating to instincts. First, a child renounces his instinct for pleasure because of a fear of an external authority like his parent. Second, the child erects an internal authority and renounces his instinct "owing to fear of conscience," in Freud's own words. ⁶⁷ Third, the aggressiveness of the individual conscience in the child continues the original aggressiveness of the parental figure. Fourth, every time the child renounces an instinct out of fear of the harsh conscience, "every renunciation of instinct now becomes a dynamic source of conscience and every fresh renunciation increases the latter's severity and intolerance." ⁶⁸ Freud concludes: "If this is

correct, we may assert truly that in the beginning conscience arises through the suppression of an aggressive impulse, and that it is subsequently reinforced by fresh suppressions of the same kind.”⁶⁹

This aggressive impulse is the Oedipus complex which Freud claims “is probably the earliest form in which the phenomenon of conscience is met with.”⁷⁰ The conscience reaches way beyond the individual past of a particular child’s memories into the collective past of all people who grew up in a family nexus. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud further associates this conscience with an ancient cultural memory:

Now, I think, we can at last grasp two things perfectly clearly: the part played by love in the origin of conscience and the fatal inevitability of the sense of guilt. Whether one has killed one’s father or has abstained from doing so is not really the decisive thing. One is bound to feel guilty in either case, for the sense of guilt is an expression of the conflict due to ambivalence, or the eternal struggle between Eros and the instinct of destruction of death.... the conflict is bound to express itself in the Oedipus complex, to establish the conscience and to create the first sense of guilt.⁷¹

John Paul Sartre, in his autobiography *Les Mots (The Words)*, interprets Freud’s theory more strictly than the original psychiatrist likely intended. Sartre describes the effects of the death of his father when he was a child of two:

There is no good father, that’s the rule. Don’t lay the blame on men but on the bond of paternity, which is rotten.... Had my father lived, he would have lain on me at full length and would have crushed me. As luck had it, he died young... But I readily subscribe to the verdict of an eminent psychoanalyst: I have no Superego.⁷²

Then just to be sure that his readers understood his point Sartre added later: “Actually, my father’s early retirement had left me with a most incomplete ‘Oedipus complex.’ No Superego, granted. But no aggressiveness either.”⁷³

Freud did at times suggest that the superego functioned primarily in a negative sense, and that it was the ego which developed in the mature person as a mediator between the superego, the id, and the external world. In the following example Freud ridicules the philosopher Kant: "The super-ego ---the conscience at work in the ego ---may then become harsh, cruel and inexorable against the ego which is in its charge. Kant's Categorical Imperative is thus the direct heir of the Oedipus complex."⁷⁴ Freud not only psychologizes his predecessor, he also ridicules Kant's association of the conscience with God:

I inform you that we have found out all kinds of things about the formation of the super-ego ---that is to say, about the origin of conscience. Following a well known pronouncement of Kant's which couples the conscience within us with the starry Heavens, a pious man might well be tempted to honour these two things as the masterpieces of creation. The stars are indeed magnificent, but as regards conscience God has done an uneven and careless piece of work, for a large majority of men have brought along with them only a modest amount of it or scarcely enough to be worth mentioning.⁷⁵

In the next section we will turn directly to consider how Kant's philosophy opened another erroneous path to the conscience. We already hinted at this in our brief discussion of Scheler's critique of the universalization of conscience; now we will see how in addition to the misplacement of conscience in the imagination, emotions, or memory, its dislocation in the theoretical reason also obscures its proper identity.

Conscience and Theoretical Reason

It should be noted at the outset that Kant placed the conscience in the practical reason in his text *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*: "For conscience is practical reason, holding up before a man his duty for acquittal or condemnation in every case under a law."⁷⁶ As Kant

develops his theory of conscience, it begins to move towards an abstract concept of duty:

“...as far as all man’s duties are concerned, his conscience will have to suppose someone other than himself to be the judge of his actions, if his conscience is not to contradict itself. This other may be a real or merely an ideal one which reason creates for itself.”⁷⁷ It is the ideal judge that a person creates for himself or herself that leads Kant’s theory of conscience away from simple practical reason to the operation of theoretical reason.

Thinking that ethics is an aspect of pure practical reason, Immanuel Kant emphasized the universalization of maxims and claimed that conscience was found more in the domain of universalized judgments. His philosophy defined the path to the moral good by a categorical imperative to act in such a way that the maxim for one’s action can become a universal law. This pathway to moral judgment provided a universal criteria for determining whether or not a particular act was good. Kant even noted in *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* that the ethical value of acts by Jesus Christ would need to be determined by an application of the categorical imperative: “Even the Holy One of the gospel must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before he is recognized as such.”⁷⁸ Human reason determines the criteria for moral authority.

Kant first rejects the empirical approach which had allowed feelings to determine the moral goodness or badness of an act. He states in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, “Reason determines the will in a practical law directly, not through an intervening feeling of pleasure or displeasure, even if this pleasure is taken in the law itself. Only because, as pure reason, it can be practical is it possible for it to give law.”⁷⁹ Second, Kant argues that in order for a person to be free, he has to not be affected by any causality of natural law.⁸⁰

Third, Kant concludes that the reason itself must be self-legislative: “So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle establishing universal law.”⁸¹ He describes this self regulating function of moral reason in such a way that conscience appears to be completely oriented towards this rational activity:

One ought absolutely to act in a certain way. The practical rule is therefore unconditional and thus is thought of apriori as a categorically practical proposition. The practical rule, which is thus here a law, absolutely and directly determines the will objectively, for pure reason, practical in itself, is here directly legislative.⁸²

An important aspect of Kant’s philosophy bears noting here: his emphasis on duty to the law. Duty to obey the law is also captured in traditional Catholic philosophy by the question concerning how conscience binds. Karol Wojtyla notes in *The Acting Person* that “The function of the conscience consists in distinguishing the element of moral good in the acting and in releasing and forming a sense of duty with respect to this good.”⁸³ St. Thomas dedicates Question 17, art. 3 article to the question “Does Conscience Bind?” in his work on *Truth*. He concludes that a correct conscience binds absolutely and a false conscience accidentally.⁸⁴ Since the place of duty and the binding of conscience to law moves from philosophical anthropology to ethics, we will turn instead to another aspect of Kant’s consideration of conscience.

In *The Acting Person* Karol Wojtyla directly confronts Kant’s view of conscience as self-legislative:

There is no question of assigning to the conscience, as Kant argued, the power to make its own laws— followed by an identification of this power with the notion of autonomy and thus in a way with an unrestricted freedom of the person. The conscience is no lawmaker; it does not itself create norms; rather it discovers them, as it were, in the objective order of morality of law.⁸⁵

Kant repeats his principle theory many times, summarizing and restating its fundamental theses:

Pure reason is practical of itself alone, and it gives (to man) a universal law, which we call moral law"; and "The autonomy of the will is the sole principle of all moral laws and of the duties conforming to them.... this intrinsic legislation of pure and thus practical reason is freedom in the positive sense. Therefore, the moral law expresses nothing else than the autonomy of the pure practical reason, i.e., freedom."⁸⁶

In Love and Responsibility Wojtyla again confronts Kant's theory that conscience discovers a law legislated by the self, rather than discover a natural law within whose source is Divine:

... autonomism, ... holds that man most fully asserts his value when he is his own legislator, when he feels himself to be the source of all law and all justice (Kant.) This is erroneous: man could only be his own ultimate lawgiver if, instead of being a creature, he were his own first cause... But before and above all else man's conscience, his immediate guide in all his doings, must be in harmony with the law of nature.⁸⁷

Kant's erroneous focus on theoretical reason reduces conscience to searching for a univocal and universalizable good when the good is actually an analogical reality. This is why Kant mistakenly thought that Jesus Christ's goodness would need to be first measured by the categorical imperative before being recognized as truly good. We will now turn to consider the fifth erroneous way of locating conscience. After the imagination, emotions, memory, and theoretical intellect the conscience gets obscured in the will.

Conscience and the Will

Frederick Nietzsche's location of the conscience in the will has two steps: first, stating what he thinks conscience is and ought to be; and second, placing the origin of truth about

what is and ought to be in the power of the will and the will to power.

In the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* entitled "Guilt, Bad Conscience, and the Like," Nietzsche heralds the great development in the human being which discovers an interior freedom and responsibility for self-government:

The proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege of responsibility, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate, has in his case penetrated to the profoundest depths and become instinct, the dominating instinct. What will he call this dominating instinct, supposing he feels the need to give it a name? The answer is beyond doubt: this sovereign man calls it his conscience.⁸⁸

While freedom and responsibility are truly a great human privilege, and while human conscience does indeed penetrate to the proudest depths of our personal identity, Nietzsche's first error is to identify conscience with a human instinct, or more precisely what he calls 'a dominating instinct.'

Next Nietzsche offers his 'so-called genealogy' of the instinct he has identified with conscience:

His conscience? — ...the concept of 'conscience' that we encounter in its highest, almost astonishing, manifestation, has a long history and variety of forms behind it. To possess the right to stand security for oneself and to do so with pride, thus to possess also the right to affirm oneself — this ... is a ripe fruit, but also a late fruit...⁸⁹

Of course persons have a right to affirm the self because they have a duty to affirm the self, but the proper question concerns how to engage in this affirmation of self through the conscience.

Nietzsche correctly identifies the 'sting' or 'bite' of a bad conscience which we experience when our conscience operates in relation to an act we think that we should not have

done.⁹⁰ However, he incorrectly reduces genuine guilt to guilty feelings which may accompany a sense of having been responsible for freely choosing to do something we should have not done or omitting to do something we should have done. Here Nietzsche loses his way when he offers his analysis of the origins of and solution for a 'bad conscience'. Using an anthropological genealogy Nietzsche argues that man's original conscience or "instinct for freedom" becomes misdirected away from the external world and towards the self as the origin of bad conscience: "This instinct for freedom forcibly made latent — ... pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself: that, and that alone, is what the bad conscience is in its beginnings."⁹¹

His 'genealogical' argument unfolds as follows: the human being developed guilty feelings and a bad conscience when he turned his deep dominating instinct away from the external world, where it had served him well as hunter and warrior and turned it towards himself. "Hostility, cruelty, joy persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction — all this turned against the possessors of such instincts: that is the origin of the 'bad conscience.'"⁹² In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche identifies this turning back against the self with the properties of the brain of the leech in his description of the conscientious man of the spirit whose "conscience" of his spirit is "the life that cuts into life" and with its own blood increased its knowledge.⁹³

The original genealogical characteristics of conscience are all grouped together by Nietzsche within the phrase "instinct for freedom." Next, the instinct for freedom is identified with the will to power: "For fundamentally it is the same active force that is at work...in the 'labyrinth of the breast,' to use Goethe's expression, creates for itself a bad conscience and

builds negative ideals — namely, the instinct for freedom (in my language: the will to power)... ”⁹⁴

Since Nietzsche thinks that the origin of bad conscience is an act of the will, which chooses to turn against oneself the instinct to dominate things outside of the self, it is not surprising that he argues that the solution to a bad conscience is to turn the will outwards once again. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he argues that the will to power must reject any absolute good. So instead of a bad conscience being freed by measuring itself against an objective good, the bad conscience supposedly frees itself by rejecting its own measure. Consider the following three passages from *Zarathustra*: “Then speak and stammer, This is my good, this I love; it pleases me wholly; thus alone do I want the good. I do not want it as divine law; I do not want it as human statute and need: it shall not be a signpost for me to overearths and paradises;”⁹⁵ or, “A tablet of the good hangs over every people... behold, it is the voice of their will to power,” and “Verily, men gave themselves all their good and evil”⁹⁶

A similar argument to this rejection of objective good is made by Nietzsche against objective truth. The second mention of the will to power occurs in a section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that begins: “Will to truth,” you who are wisest call that which impels you and fills you with lust?... You want to make all being thinkable...[t]hus your will wants it... That is your whole will, you who are wisest: a will to power — when you speak of good and evil too, and of valuations. ”⁹⁷ Once again, Nietzsche destroys the very measure which conscience provides for concrete human acts, or the particular true good which the intellect proposes to the will for choice.

Not only does bad conscience based on the will alone become a labyrinth with no way

out, it also becomes a self-destroying activity. Wojciech Giertych, O.P. in an article entitled "Conscience and the *Liberum Arbitrium*" describes why conscience can not be seated in the will. Following a Thomistic line of argument he states that: "Conscience belongs to the order of cognition and not to the order of appetite."⁹⁸ The will is a spiritual faculty that follows the true good as suggested to it by reason. Since the will is oriented towards the good, it spontaneously seeks to move towards a particular good proposed to it. Thus, it acts after the true good is impressed on it by the intellect; it does not create and propose true goods first. Giertych summarizes it this way: "The will is not basically a power of coercion; rather, it is a faculty that suffers impression, that is, the stamp of the good presented by reason that elicits in the will its drive."⁹⁹

However, Nietzsche's greater legacy is to confuse people by locating the conscience in the will itself. The will works in complement with the conscience, when it affects a choice to examine the conscience concerning a particular act and when it affects a choice to act in conformity with one's conscience, but the will does not itself house the conscience which is located somewhere else within the person. We will now turn to the final pathway of our consideration or the voice of conscience. This pathway is different from the erroneous ones identified above as imagination, emotions, memory, theoretical reason, and will because an inner voice can at times truly lead one to the hidden treasure of conscience. However, an inner voice can also lead people away from conscience. Thus, a philosophical approach to conscience needs to have a framework within which the inner voice can be evaluated.

Conscience and Hearing an Inner Voice

The argument that conscience is a response to an interior voice a person hears was first claimed by Socrates in his public defence described in Plato's *Apology*: "I am subject to a divine or supernatural experience, which Meletus saw fit to travesty in his indictment. It began in my early childhood — a sort of voice which comes to me, and when it comes it always dissuades me from what I am proposing to do, and never urges me on."¹⁰⁰ This primarily negative prohibition of conscience is characterized by Romano Guardini in *The Death of Socrates* by its divine origin: "He presents himself before a spiritual court: before Apollo, to whom he is conscious of a special obligation, and gives him an account of how he has carried out the god's mission; he appears before his own conscience, and examines himself as to whether he has done what is right."¹⁰¹

The fact that the voice of conscience seems to have a supernatural origin, even for Socrates who did not have faith as we know it, has led philosophers over the centuries to relegate the voice of conscience more properly to theology and in particular to moral theology. In *The Splendour of Truth*, we read that Saint Bonaventure taught that conscience is like a herald of God who commands things as coming from God's authority and that moral conscience opens a person to the call of the voice of God.¹⁰² Similarly, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, quoting *Gaudium et spes*, notes that a person hears the voice of conscience in his most secret core and sanctuary where "he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths."¹⁰³

The identification of the conscience with an individual encounter with the personal God

transforms its identity from a simple act of the human person following a natural law within into an interpersonal reality. Again the *Catechism*, this time quoting Cardinal Newman, “[Conscience is a messenger of him, who ... speaks to us...and teaches us and rules us by his representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ.”¹⁰⁴

For Catholic philosophers, even though conscience can be experienced as an inner voice, it is also approached through the dual operations of theoretical and practical reason; and reason is understood as being in union with the source of the inner voice of Divine Reason.

Thomas Aquinas argues:

However, since the act is particular and the judgment of synderesis is universal, the judgment of synderesis can be applied to the act only if some particular judgment is used as the minor premise. Sometimes, higher reason furnishes this particular judgment; sometimes, lower reason does. Thus, the act of conscience is the result of a kind of particular syllogism.¹⁰⁵

Protestant philosophers, however, have offered a different understanding. The 19th century philosopher Kierkegaard struggled in *Fear and Trembling* to consider the relation of faith and reason to the hearing of an inner voice.¹⁰⁶ In Problem I which considers the question of whether there can be a teleological suspension of the ethical, Kierkegaard objects to Hegel’s chapter on “Good and Conscience” in *Philosophy of Right* because of its suggestion that a religious individual who steps outside of the universal ethical law, necessarily falls out of relation to the true good.¹⁰⁷

Using the pseudonym Johannes de Silencio to describing Abraham’s experience of hearing God ask him to take his beloved Son Issac to the mountain for sacrifice, Kierkegaard analysed the great difficulty that an individual person might have in determining the source of

an inner voice. He suggested that only in faith could a person decide to follow the inner voice which contradicted his reason. Kierkegaard indicated that this uncertainty of whether the voice is from God, from the imagination, or from the devil causes the fear and trembling in a person considering whether or not to follow the commands of the voice. This argument of Kierkegaard suggests that conscience might be relegated outside of philosophy to theology (if the voice is from God or the devil) and to psychology (if the voice is from the imagination). Catholic philosophers have for centuries placed a study of conscience firmly in the range of normal practical human reason and natural law available to a person without faith and whose proper exercise is compatible with and even important to normal psychological development.

In the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger dedicates an entire chapter of Being and Time to the call of conscience. He affirms a critical as well as a positive dimension of conscience in the necessity for a person to heed resolutely the call of conscience. At first, Heidegger appears to consider conscience in a traditional manner. He laments the fact that the human being (Dasein) "fails to hear itself, and listens away to the `they`" which is filled with what he characterizes as everyday idle talk."¹⁰⁸ Next, Heidegger describes the character of conscience as a call back to self understanding, summoning the self back from the world of the `they` to a world of self disclosure. When conscience is disclosed as `the call of care` it still seems as though Heidegger is leading his reader to a good pathway to find conscience where it properly resides.

However, Heidegger begins to turn off the path when he identifies who or what is calling the human person through conscience: "But is it at all necessary to keep raising explicitly the question of who does the calling?...In conscience Dasein calls itself.... The call

comes *from me*, and yet *from beyond me*.”¹⁰⁹ Heidegger offers what he claims is an ontological and existential laying bare of the identity of conscience as ‘a wanting to have a conscience’, as a potential for a person’s ‘being as care’ and ‘being-guilty.’ Yet, when he delineates the aspects of this authentic being as care, Heidegger does not give moral foundations for moral judgments. It is only the call of Being that is heard in the voice, without any indication of good to be done or evil to be avoided other than the primordial calling out of an identification with the ‘they.’ Thus, we find in Heidegger’s analysis of conscience a progressive emptying of moral judgment which ultimately leads to a depersonalization of the voice being heard in the call:

In his words:

This interpretation of the conscience passes itself off as recognizing the call in the sense of a voice which is ‘universally ‘binding, and which speaks in a way that is ‘not just subjective’. Furthermore, the ‘universal’ conscience becomes exalted to a ‘world-conscience,’ which still has the phenomenal character of an ‘it’ and ‘nobody,’ yet which speaks — there in the individual ‘subject’ ---- as this indefinite something.

But this ‘public conscience’ — what else is it than the voice of the ‘they’? A ‘world-conscience’ is a dubious fabrication, and Dasein can come to this only because conscience, in its basis and its essence, is in each case mine — not only in the sense that in each case the appeal is to one’s own most potentiality-for-Being, but because the call comes from that entity which in each case I myself am.”¹¹⁰

pos. delete

Heidegger’s analysis of conscience is complex and penetrating, and he seeks to overcome the limitations of previously false theories of conscience. However, he leads to another kind of dead end, i.e. that of a self absorbed search for authenticity without any communal foundations for differentiating moral good and evil.¹¹¹ Karol Wojtyla notes the positive relation of conscience to more than one person in *The Acting Person* when he states: “The fact of the conscience, for all its subjectiveness, still retains a measure of intersubjectivity; it is in the conscience that there is achieved the peculiar union of moral truthfulness and duty that

manifests itself as the normative power of truth.”¹¹² The moral theologian Livio Melina defends the Catholic understanding of “[t]he communion form of ‘listening’” in which the human person goes far beyond Heidegger’s withdrawal from the ‘they-self’ and establishes a intercommunion which overcomes all autonomy of conscience. He concludes that “the link between conscience and ‘communio’ is thus intrinsic and dynamic.”¹¹³ Philosophical anthropology points the way to this reality, while theology seeks to delineate it.

Conclusion

Pope John Paul II calls on philosophers to engage in a new evangelization of contemporary culture, “to enlighten consciences with the light of the full meaning of human nature.”¹¹⁴ He also notes that Christian philosophers need to base teaching and evangelizing on a sound anthropology and philosophy. In this lecture we have indicated several ways in which philosophers have misled others about the location of conscience by placing its operation in the imagination, emotions, memory, theoretical intellect, will, or impersonal inner voice.

Since Thomas Aquinas situated his discussion of conscience in his Treatise on Man, in Part 1, Q. 79, art. 13 of the *Summa Theologica* “Whether Conscience be a Power?” among other intellectual powers of the soul, the Scholastic understanding of conscience places it firmly in the study of philosophy and in particular in the area of philosophical anthropology. The way some Catholic philosophers will solve the radical differentiation between an individual voice of conscience, isolation of consciousness, and a universal rule of reason which plagued the Protestant philosophers Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard will be through an analogical understanding of the good.

The analogical theory of the good is well articulated by M.A. Krapiec in *I-Man*:

Through analogy ... it was understood, in the Peripatetic system, that the concept of the good stands at the basis of the justification of every activity, especially human activity. For man, the good is the constantly fuller actualization of the potentiality of his nature; in every other instance, there is another actualization --- analogically understood.¹¹⁵

The vacillation between a particular and a universal delimitation of conscience which we saw in several erroneous pathways to conscience above can be best integrated into a coherent theory by an analogical understanding of the good.

At the beginning of this lecture we noted three examples of persons who seemed to lack a unity of life and a logic tight compartmentalized conscience ^{who had} ~~by~~ ^{which e2} support ~~for~~ ^{to them} and acts of abortion, sexual abuse, or taking money from persons who had entrusted it. All of these examples involve harming innocent persons. Many times these people appear to exercise their conscience fairly well in other areas, ^{by} being leaders of families, Churches, business, or other respected institutions of community life. We need to ask whether the neglect of accurate teaching about what conscience is, when combined with the simultaneous failure to continuously engage with and evaluate the omnipresent inaccurate theories about conscience in secular education, may have contributed to the phenomenon noted in the examples.

Another way to address this phenomenon of the partially disengaged conscience is to consider an analogical application of a discovery that the psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton identifies as "the phenomenon of doubling." In *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* Lifton notes how ^{doctor} ~~a person~~ may manifest one way of acting in his family or in general society, but another way of acting in a prison camp. He suggests that this

phenomenon of doubling indicates that the person's conscience was hidden and unavailable during activity in the prison camp.¹¹⁶ Describing a "healing-killing conflict and paradox"

Lifton meticulously traced several examples of physicians who engaged in what he calls

"Doubling: the Faustian Bargain: *In his words:*

The way in which doubling allowed Nazi doctors to avoid guilt was not by the elimination of conscience but by what can be called the transfer of conscience. The requirements of conscience were transferred to the Auschwitz self, which placed it within its own criteria for good (duty, loyalty to group, "improving Auschwitz conditions," etc.), thereby freeing the original self from responsibility for actions there...

x x x

In doubling, one part of the self "disavows" another part. What is repudiated is not reality itself--- the individual Nazi doctor knew that he selected [people to die], but did not interpret selections as murder.¹¹⁷

The transfer of conscience to an outside group which determines particular criteria for good and evil involves crossing the boundary of the practical judgment whose obligation it is the individual person to make. It is often noted how people who once thought an act to be immoral change their minds when the same acts becomes legal. These persons transfer their conscience from the moral law within to the civil law without. This crossing the boundary of the practical reason by a transfer of conscience is particularly stark when it comes to the acts of Nazi doctors in concentration camps. Yet, there is an analogy worth noting with a woman who transfers her conscience to the National Organization of Women when it comes to abortion or with a person who transfer his conscience to an excessive capitalist mentality in his workplace.

Lifton notes further "that the problem [of doubling] is never merely, or even primarily, one of individual psychology. Collective currents either press large numbers of people in the direction of dissociation and disembodiment or, in contrast, encourage or even nurture the

more integrated."¹¹⁸ Since philosophy can help identify collective currents which push or pull persons towards a greater integration or contribute to a disintegration, it would be important for philosophers to indicate the extent that collective cultural currents contribute to the examples of harming innocent persons noted above and which influence an individual person to surrender his or her conscience to an outside identity.

Beginning to teach about a philosophy of conscience in universities and seminaries would be one way to contribute to the new evangelization. Teaching from a solid Thomistic base with an opening to new developments in philosophy such as Lublin Thomism would enable philosophers to directly engage in the class room with modern and contemporary authors on the topic of conscience. Students should not be left with the false impression that the erroneous theories about conscience are the most up to date theories. The truth is always being rearticulated especially in Catholic philosophy. It is our obligation to communicate this truth in such a way that our students can find the treasure of their own conscience and live well by it.

Endnotes

1. Antonio Rosmini, *Conscience* (Durham: Rosmini House, 1989), #4, 3-4.
2. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1948), Pt. 1, Q 79, art. 13 and *Truth*, 3 Vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954), Vol. 2, 314-337.
3. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (New York: Image Doubleday, 1995), #1778.
4. M.A. Krapiec, *I-Man: An Introduction of Philosophical Anthropology* (New Britain, Ct.: Mariel Publications, 1983), p. 209.
5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1, Q. 79, arts. 11-13.
6. Timothy C. Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
7. Ralph McInerny, 'Conscience and the Object of the Moral Act,' *Crises of Conscience*, John Haas, ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 97.
8. See Peter Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), note 31, p. 282. "...our conscience includes St. Thomas' 'synderesis' (article 12) and 'conscience' (article 13)."
9. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1, Q 79, art. 13.
10. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Pt. 1, Q. 79, art. 13.
11. M.A. Krapiec, *Person and Natural Law* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 230.
12. M.A. Krapiec, 'Metaphysical Analogy: The Analogy of 'Being' and 'Cognition,' in *Metaphysics: An Outline of a History of Being* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), Pt. 3, chapter 5, 447- 485. Norris Clarke's creative completion of Aquinas, with his emphasis on the being as relational especially in the being of persons lends itself to this analogical application of moral cognition as well. See *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998).
13. Krapiec, *Person and Natural Law*, 204-205.
14. John Paul II, *Splendour of Truth* (Quebec: Editions Paulines, 1993), #61.
15. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Conscience and Truth," *Crises of Conscience*, 10.
16. See Charles Taylor's discussion of Descartes's disengaged subject and Locke's punctual self and disengaged consciousness,' in *Sources of the Self :The Making of the Modern Identity*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), chapter 9, 159ff.
17. Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 152-53.
18. Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 153.
19. William James, What Pragmatism Means, *Selected Papers on Philosophy* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1961), "Riding now on the front of this wave of scientific logic, Messrs. Schiller and Dewey appear with their pragmatistic account of what truth everywhere signifies. Everywhere, these teachers say, 'truth' in our ideas and beliefs means the same thing as it means in science. It means, they say, nothing but this, that ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience..." , 206.

20. James, What Pragmatism Means, *Selected Papers*, "The term (pragmatism) is derived from the same Greek work "pragma" meaning action, from which our words 'practice' and 'practical' come. It was first introduced into philosophy by Mr: Charles Pierce in 1878. In an article entitled "How to Make our Ideas Clear", in the Popular Science Monthly for January of that year, in which Mr. Pierce, after pointing out that our beliefs are really rules for action, said that, to develop a thought's meaning, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance."
21. James, The Energies of Men, *Selected Papers*, 57.
22. James, The Energies of Men, *Selected Papers*, 57.
23. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 114.
24. James, Humanism and Truth, *Selected Papers*, 231. My emphasis
25. James, Humanism and Truth, *Selected Papers*, 220.
26. James, *Variety of Religious Experience*, 355.
27. James, The Will to Believe, *Selected Papers*, 106.
28. John Paul II, *Fides et ratio* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1998), #28.
29. James, What Pragmatism Means, *Selected Papers*, 203.
30. James, What Pragmatism Means, *Selected Papers*, 209.
31. See www.now.org/issues/abortion/rights-rep.html.
32. James, Humanism and Truth, *Selected Papers*, 229.
33. James, The Will to Believe, *Selected Papers*, 116-117.
34. James, The Will to Believe, *Selected Papers*, 122.
35. Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism*, 232.
36. Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 152-153.
37. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. Pt. I. Q. 79 art. 13.
38. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), Book III, Pt. 1, sect.1, 458.
39. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Pt. 1, sect. 2, 470.
40. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Book III, Pt. 1, sect. 2, 471.
41. Wojtyla, "The Role of Reason in Ethics," *Person and Community* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 63.
42. Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Christine E. Gudorf, and Mary D. Pellauer, eds., *Women's Consciousness: Women's Conscience: A reader in Feminist Ethics* (Minneapolis, Chicago, New York: Winston Press, 1985).
43. Andolsen, et al, *Women's Consciousness: Women's Conscience*, xi.
44. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1982), chapter 3 'Concepts of Self and Morality,' 65.
45. Lorainne Code, *What Can She Know: Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 124.
46. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 105.
47. Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt towards the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
48. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*, 324.

49. Scheler, *Formalism*, 322.
50. Wojtyla, The Problem of the Theory of Morality, *Person and Community*, 138.
51. Wojtyla, 'The Separation of the Experience from the Act in Ethics,' *Person and Community*, 38.
52. Wojtyla, *Ibid.*
53. Wojciech Giertych, O.P., "Conscience and the Liberum Arbitrium", *Crisis of Conscience*, 68.
54. See M. A. Krapiec' discussion of Freud's 'Interpretation of Man' in *I-Man*, 51-63.
55. Freud, "The Internal World," *An Outline of Psycho-analysis*, *Complete Works*, 23:205.
32. Sigmund Freud, "Dissection of the Personality," *New Introductory Lectures*, *Complete Works*, 22:66 .
57. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Complete Works*, 21:136. Yet, Freud does clarify his thinking. To return to his *New Introductory Lectures* Freud notes: "I might simply say that the special agency which I am beginning to distinguish in the ego is conscience. But it is more prudent to keep the agency as something independent and to suppose that conscience is one of its functions and that self-observation, which is an essential preliminary to the judging activity of conscience, is another of them. *New Introductory Lectures*, *Complete Works*, 22:60.
58. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, *Complete Works*, 22:60.
63. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, *Complete Works*, 22:61.
60. Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, *Complete Works*, 23.
61. Freud, *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, *Complete Works*, 14:96.
62. Freud, *Ibid.*
63. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, *Complete Works*, 22:64-65.
64. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Complete Works*, 21: 127.
65. J.F. Donceel, S.J., *Philosophical Psychology*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 299.
66. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, *Complete Works*, 8:68.
67. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Complete Works*, 21:128.
68. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Complete Works*, 21:129.
69. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Complete Works*, 21:130.
70. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, *Complete Works*, 8:67.
71. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Complete Works*, 21: 132.
72. Jean Paul Sartre, *The Words* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Premier Book, 1964) , 11.
73. Sartre, *The Words*, 16.
74. Freud, *The Economic Problem of Masochism*, " *Complete Works*, 19:167.
75. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, *Complete Works*, 22:61.
76. Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue: Part II The Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1964), #400, p. 59.
77. Kant, *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, #439-439, p. 101.
78. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1993), #408, 21.
79. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956.), #25, p. 24.

80. "Now, as no determining ground of the will except the universal legislative form can serve as a law for it, such a will must be conceived as wholly independent of the natural law of appearances in their mutual relations, i.e., the law of causality. Such independence is called *freedom* in the strictest, i.e., transcendental, sense. Therefore, a will to which only the legislative form of the maxim can serve as a law is a free will." Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, #29, p. 29.
81. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, #31, p. 30.
82. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, #31, p. 31.
83. Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 156.
84. Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, 3. Vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954), vol. II, p.324. See also Jacques Maritain's discussion of the invincibly erroneous conscience in *An Introduction to the Problems of Moral Philosophy* (Albany: Magi Books, 1990), pp. 192-93. According to the Maritain Center at Notre Dame, Maritain had planned to write a book on the topic of conscience, but never managed to complete it.
85. Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 165.
86. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, #32 and 33, pp. 33-34.
87. Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 247.
88. Frederick Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), II.2, p. 60.
89. Nietzsche, *Ibid.*, II.3, p. 60.
90. Nietzsche, *Ibid.*, II.14, p. 81. See also, Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage, 1968), #233-234 and #1009.
91. Nietzsche, *Ibid.*,
92. Nietzsche, *Ibid.*, II.16, p. 85.
93. Frederick Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (insert full citation), "The Leech", pp. 250-51.
94. Nietzsche, *Ibid.*, II.18, p. 87.
95. Frederick Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New York: Penguin, 1988), "On Enjoying and suffering the passions," 36.
96. Nietzsche, *Ibid.*, "On the Thousand and One Goals," p. 58-59.
97. Nietzsche, *Ibid.*, "On Self-overcoming," p. 113.
98. Wojciech Giertych, O.P., "Conscience and the *Liberum Arbitrium*" in *Crisis of Conscience*, John M. Haas, ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 60.
99. Giertych, *Ibid.*, 61.
100. Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (Princeton: University Press, 1969), 31d.
101. Roman Guardini, *The Death of Socrates* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian, 1965), p. 31.
102. John Paul II, *The Splendour of Truth* (Quebec: Editions Pauline, 1993), #58.
103. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1776 quoting *Gaudium et spes* #16.
104. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1778, quoting, John Henry Cardinal Newman, "Letter to the Duke of Norfolk," V., in *Certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching II* (London: Longmans Green, 1885), p. 248.
105. Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, vol II, Q. 17 art. 2, p. 324.
106. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (London: Penguin Books, 1985).

107. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Problema I, pp. 83-84. See also, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1942), subsection 3 'Good and Conscience', pp. 86-104.
108. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), #271, p. 316.
109. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, #275, 320.
110. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, #278, 323.
111. Ricoeur, *The Just*, 155.
112. Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 162.
113. Livio Melina, "Moral conscience and 'communio': Toward a response to the challenge of ethical pluralism," *Communio* 20 (winter, 1993): 673-686, p. 684.
114. John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 20, 2002, n. 12 as recorded in *Magnificat* (October 2002), vol. 4, no. 8, 293-94.
115. Krapiec, *I-Man*, 254.
116. Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 2000).
117. Lifton, *Nazi Doctors*, 421-22.
118. Lifton, *Nazi Doctors*, 500.